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TWO PERSPECTIVES OF THE MIND
(Lecture given Sunday, July 21, 1985
by Master Sheng-Yen)

In an earlier lecture I spoke about Buddha's explanation to Ananda in the Surangama Sutra of the two perspectives, or views, of the mind. There is only one mind, but there are two basically different ways to look at it.

The first perspective is that of the mind of ordinary sentient beings. This is the mind of attachment, the mind which keeps us moving between birth and death, the mind which creates all dharmas, all phenomena. This phenomena-creating mind is the mind of arising, because that which is created necessarily contains discriminations, differences -- particulars that are not in unity.

The alternative perspective is that of the mind of the Buddha. According to this view, there really is no mind. This is the state of non-arising which is our true self-nature. And to realize this self-nature is to realize the dharma of non-arising. When this is achieved, the bondage of samsara is broken, and vexations are ended. Not one single dharma, not one phenomenon, can arise out of this "uncreate" stage. With the uncreate, there is no true, no false dharma, there is no dharma at all.

For the remainder of the lecture I will be speaking, for the most part, about the first perspective, the mind of arising, and the ways by which we may affect this arising.

When we say "all phenomena are created by the mind," we must understand that something in the mind is manifested and then brought into the world. Generally, we begin with a desire for something. For example, a couple I know had no children for the first three or four years of marriage. The husband's father visited them one day, and said, "You may not want children, but I'm looking forward to being a grandfather." The couple decided to have a baby, and after some time the wife gave birth to a

girl. When the girl was two, the parents thought that they would like to give her a baby brother. But the next child turned out to be another girl. The desire for a child started the process that led to birth of one girl and then another, but the couple wanted a boy. So you see, you may get what you want, but you may not get it in the way you want it.

The idea behind "created by the mind" is often misunderstood: When I was in Japan, a friend of mine married. His first child was a girl. He had a second, and then a third child -- all girls. He approached me and said, "Master, I no longer believe in Buddhadharma! The sutras say all phenomena are created by the mind. O.K., I've had a boy in mind, for some time now, and all I've gotten were girls!" I said to him, "You've misinterpreted the teachings. It certainly doesn't mean that all you have to do is to wish for something and it will suddenly appear out of thin air. If that were the case you wouldn't have to work. You'd never have to lift a finger. You would simply say, 'I want a beautiful wife,' and presto! She would appear. A beautiful house? A fortune in gold? It would all be yours just for the asking. For one thing, good fortune on demand like this would be quite contrary to the laws of karma. The sutras do teach that all phenomena -- all dharmas -- are creations of the mind, but this teaching is not meant to be taken in such a superficial, literal way.

"All phenomena are creations of the mind," means this: Sentient beings are filled with desires and intentions to do all manner of things. The actions that result from these intentions have consequences. These consequences are what create all phenomena.

To really create something of significance takes more than just wishing. Here is an example: Ch'an Master Empty Cloud travelled widely during his lifetime, and wherever he went, he undertook the building of a monastery or temple, or he would oversee the repair or renovation of an existing temple. People who saw his accomplishments would often ask, "How is it so easy for you to build one monastery after another?" The master replied, "It is because I have monasteries in my mind." Others would say to him, "We, too have monasteries in our minds." But Empty Cloud said, "No, I have monasteries in my mind, you people do not. This is because I have been building monasteries in my head, stone by stone, for a great while. These monasteries are already solidly built. Now, when I want to build a temple or a monastery, the task is easy because they have already been built in my mind. What you call monasteries in your minds are not really monasteries. You haven't even taken the first step towards building a monastery."

Then someone said to the Master, "A monk should be like a floating cloud or running water. There should be no attachment to worldly things. Why then do you keep on building monastery after monastery. And what's more, in the past monasteries have come to ruin or been destroyed by malevolent people. This will happen to

the monasteries that you build -- you are providing the opportunity for people to do evil and amass bad karma. Why do you bother doing all this?"

Empty Cloud said, "When people let monasteries go to ruin or destroy them purposefully, this is the force of karma. At those times, when sentient beings have little merit, virtue, or good karma, then monasteries will fall into ruin or be destroyed. On the other hand, when their merit, virtue, and karma are better, there will be a need for monasteries, and they will be built. Certainly, at some future time they will go to ruin. But I don't concern myself with things to come. If there are two or three good people who will live in a monastery, that merits its existence. If someone comes tomorrow and tears it down? I don't concern myself with that, nor do I concern myself with what happened in the past. I do what has to be done now."

"And according to Buddhadharma, all things result from actions formulated in the minds of sentient beings. These things are comparable to flowers in the sky or the moon shining in water. They are illusions. Flowers don't grow in the sky; the moon is not submerged in a lake. Such actions spring from the minds of sentient beings. Nevertheless, these dharma activities are what I want to do in every moment. Monasteries, temples, places for practice -- they are all comparable to reflections of the moon in the water. Still I build these things wherever I go, at every chance. I know that they may pass away like the reflection of the moon. Maybe I do these things because I am just an old fool."

When we say that all phenomena are creations of the mind, we are not talking about a wandering mind. That is, idly daydreaming and doing nothing will never enable you to create or build anything. But if your mind really moves in a particular direction, it will have the tendency to produce action according to the original idea or a thought. What it is that you do or accomplish amounts to a creation of your mind. And again, if you have a particular feeling towards somebody or something, you will immediately form a relationship with that person or that thing. In that sense, such people and things are creations of your mind. People whom you have never met, whom you have never heard of, have no existence for you. According to the nature of causes and conditions, we all have had a relationship to the Buddha. All sentient beings are in the mind of the Buddha.

The number of people that you can have in your mind, with whom you can have relationships, depends on your level of attainment, your wisdom and ability. Someone with little wisdom or ability cannot have a relationship with a great number of people or things. A great religious teacher is concerned with all beings in the world. Parents are concerned with the welfare of their children. The president of a country is concerned with the citizens of that country. What the mind encompasses is determined by the nature of the individual, his stature, vision, and goals.

The strength of a relationship depends on the presence the other person has in your mind. A woman disciple who has been with me for a long time finally got married. Still she assured me that I was number one; her husband number two. When she and her husband came to see me, even he said this was true. But I said, "It's not true. You have the number one position. Your wife sees me only two or three times a year. The rest of the time she stays home and takes care of you." The husband said, "When she's home, my wife scolds me constantly. She would never make such remarks to you." Once again I said, "This is only because she lives with you and sees me so infrequently. If she saw me more frequently, who knows how she might act."

Only things to which we have a deep attachment or things we seriously would like to do really exist within our minds. I'm sure that this woman disciple considers me important, but her husband is also important. These are two very different relationships. What she expects from me, and what she expects from her husband are two very different things. Only when we are close to someone or something, do we really take him, her, or it seriously. These people or things live in our minds. We read that the world contains over four billion people. We have only met a tiny percentage of these people, and the number of them that we have had any real relationship with, that live in our minds, is very small. Does this mean that these four billion don't exist for us? Not exactly. The fact that all of us are born on the earth at the same time means that in the past we have had some karmic relationship with these people.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra it says that the mind is like a master artist who can paint whatever is perceived in the five skandhas. What is now in the mind can be manifested in the world. And what now exists in the mind will probably be manifested in the future. An analogy I often use to explain this phenomenon is that of comparing the mind to a great water tank filled with grains of sand which are continually rising and sinking. Everytime the mind moves, it is like adding a color to a grain of sand. A strong feeling or reaction will add a deep hue to the sand that will not wash away for a long time. Milder reactions add lighter colors that fade quickly. A grain that sinks to the bottom will eventually rise to the top and you will see it again. Good karma and bad karma come and go in this way -- always the results of our own thoughts and actions, now appearing now disappearing, sometimes good fortune, sometimes misfortune. We often speak about promoting the welfare of the poor or doing something for our own good. Rarely do we speak of promoting disaster for ourselves. But it is a fact: all disasters are created by ourselves for ourselves.

If there is something strong in the mind, something with a deep color, it is hard to prevent it from resurfacing. The builders of a waste treatment plant in Kao Hsiung, Taiwan found that the plant created more waste than it cleaned. They had good intentions, but the nature of the problem and the factory itself undid the original purpose. Another example would be the side

effects that a drug might produce -- sometimes worse than the disease it is meant to cure. In our daily lives we may not think of creating disaster for ourselves, but somehow we end up creating bad karma. We don't really wish to cause harm to other people, but we often harm them despite ourselves.

Wars have occurred throughout history for a variety of reasons -- ideological, political, economic. Often leaders wage wars for what they consider good reasons, but nonetheless, they cause great suffering. Marx may not have been evil, in fact he was motivated by a desire to help people, but his teachings have caused great suffering. We have seen how all things are created by the mind, and how good and evil karma may result from these creations. We cannot prevent these things from occurring, cannot stop the creations of the mind, until we reach the second stage of the mind -- the non-arising, the uncreate.

If you wish to do something -- make a vow as we say in Buddhism -- do you seriously start building the object of your desire or intention in your mind? When you do, your mind is truly creating something. If you are really putting all your effort in this direction, then that is the truth of "all phenomena are created by the mind." So to my friend who had three daughters, I might have said, "I know of another family with three sons -- they balance out the girls in your family." Or if you look at the situation in another way, if we can strive and attain Buddhahood, then what is the difficulty in having a son?

Here is a story of a childless couple who strove through great difficulty to have a son. They were in their late forties and had been trying to have a child for years. They went from temple to temple, praying to various deities. Nothing happened, until one day they met an old monk who said to them, "Find an old monk in poor health, take care of him, and eventually you'll have your son." The couple located an old monk in a nearby temple who was seriously ill, and they took him home and nursed him back to health. But he was very old, and after only two years he was on his death bed. He said, "You have been so kind to me, how can I repay you?" The couple said, "You don't really owe us anything -- we did this for you because we wanted a son." The old monk said, "Fine, I'll come back to you as a son." After some time the wife gave birth to a son. He was a wonderful boy, and he was devoted to the couple. But when he was in his teens, the first monk who originally gave the couple advice, met the young boy and said, "You know, you're really an old friend of mine." The boy suddenly realized who he was, and said, "Well here I am. I had no choice -- the old couple were so nice to me."

There probably was a better way for the monk to help this couple than to come back as their son. But the point is that if we seriously want something enough, we should not only build it in our minds, but we should also strive to help others at the same time. Eventually we will achieve what we want. Yes, you can get what you pray for, but you must also perform good works if you really want to have your wishes fulfilled.

NEWS ITEMS

January 10, Master Sheng-Yen left the Center for Taiwan.

Tuesday nights sittings and Sunday open-house will continue as usual.

Fourteen people attended the last weekend sitting. The next weekend sitting will be 8 p.m. on Friday, January 31 until 9 p.m. on Saturday, February 1. This schedule will be repeated on the first weekend of every month.

The Chinese New Year will be celebrated on Sunday, February 9.

May 23, (Friday, 7 p.m.) - May 30 (Friday, 8 a.m.) - Seven-day Intensive Ch'an Retreat; an opportunity for students to practice Ch'an under the personal guidance of Master Sheng-Yen. For those with meditation experience only. Personal interview a prerequisite. Write or call for registration forms. Members, \$60; Non-members, \$120.

June 27, (Friday, 7 p.m.) - July 4 (Friday, 8 a.m.) - Seven-day Intensive Ch'an Retreat. Same information as above.

ALL ARE WELCOME

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